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ABSTRACT

This publication explores the need for child care, particularly for low income families, and the social importance of high quality child care. These factors are the impetus for the Campaign for Child Care NOW! organized by the Children's Defense Fund. This advocacy program is urging Congress to approve legislation that will guarantee funds to help states serve low income families who need child care help; improve the quality of child care for all children; and provide safe, constructive after school activities for those children left home alone after school. The report describes some state initiatives for improving child care access. Another section of the report examines common myths about child care regarding parental satisfaction, children's development; access to child care and other factors. Also included is an article on law enforcement officials who encouraged lawmakers to make greater investments in children's healthy development. (JPB)

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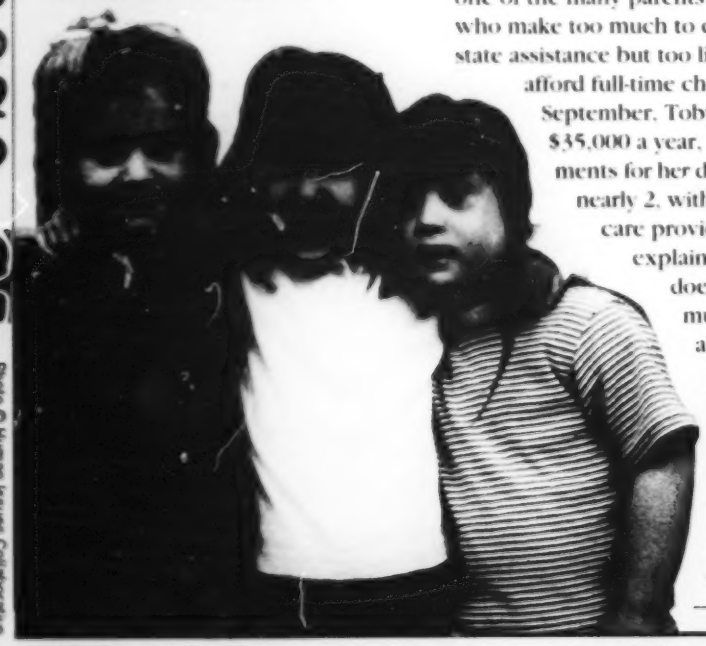
Child Care NOW!

Families need better access to affordable, quality child care

Until recently, Bernadette Montelleone and Charles Lampkin's child care expenses were so high that they constantly worried about how to buy food or pay the rent on time. Preschool costs for both Charles Edward, 3, and Chelsea, 5, ran $100 a week. Together, the couple makes under $20,000 a year, not enough to afford such high child care payments. In February, however, Bernadette received word that the state child care assistance she'd applied for months ago came through. This help is now saving the family roughly $60 a week.

"Before we received the subsidy, it was very difficult and a lot of times we came up short," she says. "It gives us a little extra money to put toward bills—rent, utilities, and bus passes—and to help buy food and clothes for the children."

Toby Simon, on the other hand, is one of the many parents in America who make too much to qualify for state assistance but too little to afford full-time child care. Last September, Toby, who earns $35,000 a year, made arrangements for her daughter Hattie, nearly 2, with a family child care provider. She explained that she doesn't have much money, and the provider agreed to give Toby a price break, charging her $200 a week instead of $275.



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After a few months, though, the provider informed Toby that Hattie would have to leave. She was told that parents who could afford to pay full price for care were clamoring for space with the provider, who desperately needed the extra money. Now Toby is searching for an alternative arrangement that she can afford.

"Hattie had been really happy there, and I thought she was doing very well," says Toby. "I was just completely devastated by this."

Bernadette and Toby are just two of the millions of working parents in the United States who are struggling to find and keep quality, affordable child care. Bernadette's story has a happy ending, but for parents like Toby and many others, there seems to be no relief in sight.

Child care is costly

Child care costs in all regions of the country can be extremely expensive, making it very difficult for parents to afford the good quality care they want for their children. Full-time care for a preschooler easily costs parents at least $4,000 annually per child and can run as high as $10,000 a year.

But low- and moderate-income families often find it impossible to pay such high rates. Many states do provide assistance to some low-income families, but eligible families frequently languish on waiting lists because the states lack sufficient resources. And a number of states provide assistance only to those families earning very low incomes, leaving many low-income working parents hard pressed to pay the full cost of care on their own.

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What's more, given that about half of all children spend part of their crucial early years being cared for by someone other than their parents, it is vitally important that the care be consistently first-rate for all children (see story, page 8). However, there's a severe shortage of good quality child care in America, and a shortage of any care for some groups, including infants and school-age children, children with special needs, children living in low-income areas, and children who need care during nontraditional hours.

"America can solve its widespread child care dilemma by providing parents with the resources they need to choose the type and quality of care they think is best for their children."

"Parents who need to work outside the home shouldn't have to face daunting struggles each month to pay the high cost of care on their own or have to sacrifice basic necessities so their children have a safe place to be during the day," says CDF Child Care Division Director Helen Blank. "Parents must be able to go to work each day secure in the knowledge that their children are well-cared for and learning while they are on the job."

Why child care matters

Numerous studies have shown that families have trouble paying for child care, that the quality of care their children receive too often is unsatisfactory, and that many parents cannot find the care they need.

These problems affect everyone: children, parents, employers, communities, and the nation. Lack of affordable child care for working parents hinders children's success in school and their healthy development. But good care can make a big difference in children's lives.

A recent study on the impact of good quality child care reported that it can help all children succeed but has an even greater impact on at-risk children's language skills and self-perception.

Another survey conducted for the U.S. Department of Education reported that preschool education programs improved cognitive abilities, classroom learning behavior, and socio-emotional development of children at risk for school failure. Preschools also promoted stronger parent—child relationships and greater likelihood of long-term school success and long-term social and economic self-sufficiency.

School-age children, too, benefit from quality care. Studies have found that good after-school programs can help children succeed and keep them out of trouble. Children attending formal child care programs during their out-of-school hours have been found to have better work habits and relationships with peers and to be better adjusted and less antisocial than children who are left alone or are informally supervised by adults.

Without adequate child care options, parents limit their productivity as workers. Many parents miss work or pass up employment opportunities because of difficulties arranging for child care. Studies also show that a lack of child care is a major barrier to work for parents receiving welfare. Child care assistance is key to helping families leave welfare for work and keep their jobs.

How communities benefit from investments in child care

Child care and early education are also critical to the success of two of society's highest priorities: helping families work and ensuring that every child enters school ready to learn. The importance of investing in child care has not gone unrecognized by the American public.

Communities that don't invest in a good supply of quality, affordable child care run the risk of paying both now and in the future—in parents who are less productive, children who don't get what they need to succeed in school, and school-age children who are at greater risk of substance abuse and criminal behavior.

Local officials agree. In a 1996 National League of Cities survey, more than half of the mayors polled selected child care as the most pressing issue from a list of 34 items. Police chiefs strongly believe that investing in child care can stop crime in their communities (see story, page 15).

Members of the general public, too, believe in the value of quality, affordable child care. According to a Lake Sosin Snell Perry survey, a bipartisan majority—74 percent—of those polled support increased investments to help low-income and middle-class families pay for child care.

The Campaign for Child Care NOW!

CDF and other national, state, and local friends of children have launched a campaign to pass major investments in child care this year. The Child Care NOW! campaign is urging Congress to approve legislation that will guarantee at least $20 billion over five years to: help states serve all low-income families who need child care help to work and support their families; improve the quality of child care for all children; and provide safe, constructive after-school activities for the nearly 5 million children left home alone after school.

"America can solve its widespread child care dilemma by providing parents with the resources they need to choose the type and quality of care they think is best for their children," says Blank.

In 1998, lawmakers have an unprecedented opportunity to make a difference in the lives of millions of children and families. More than 40 child care bills have been introduced in Congress. The most recent bills include the Child Care ACCESS (Affordable Child Care for Early Success and Security Act), S.1610, introduced by Sen. Christopher Dodd (D-Conn.) and

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cosponsored by 25 other Democratic senators, and the Caring for Children Act, S.1577, introduced by Sen. John Chafee (R-R.I.) and cosponsored by five Republican senators.

Dodd's bill provides $16.5 billion in guaranteed funds over five years to increase the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG) so states can help more families afford good child care. The bill also would increase the availability and quality of school-age care and provide funds both to states and local communities to strengthen the quality of child care.

In addition, Dodd's bill expands the Dependent Care Tax Credit (DCTC) to help middle-income parents with their child care costs and makes it refundable for low-income families. It provides a tax credit for families with children under age 1 where one parent does not work outside the home.

Chafee's bill gives Congress the option of increasing the discretionary portion of the CCDBG from $1 billion to $2 billion per year over five years, extends the DCTC for middle-income parents who don't work outside the home, provides a new tax credit for parents with children under age 3, provides tax credits to employers, and creates a small business child care grant program.

Many members of Congress and child advocates believe that given the tobacco industry's decades-long effort to target children, tobacco taxes should be used to pay for any child care improvements. Sen. Kent Conrad (D-N.D.) has introduced the Healthy Kids Act, S.1638, a bill that raises the tobacco tax and earmarks $14 billion over five years for the CCDBG.

Another initiative that would go even further is the Healthy and Smoke-Free Children Act, S.1492, introduced by Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.) and in the House by Representatives Rosa DeLauro (D-Conn.) and Connie Morella (R-Md.). This bill would increase resources by close to $30 billion over five years for child care, Head Start, Early Head Start, and after-school programs, and curb teen smoking by raising the cigarette tax by $1.50 per pack over three years. More than 200 national, state, and local organizations support the child care provisions in this bill.

President Clinton would also raise $7.5 billion from tobacco to fund a portion of his child care initiative.

"The link between child care and tobacco should be obvious to all of us by now: the tobacco industry has for at least a generation jeopardized our children's health while making billions of dollars in profits by targeting our children as 'tomorrow's cigarette business,'" says CDF President Marian Wright Edelman. "Any tobacco legislation this year, with or without a settlement, ought to make sure that tobacco money is used to ensure the healthy development of future generations.

"America can no longer afford to ignore the needs of working families and children. We must make sure that children are safe and ready for school and that they are involved in positive after-school activities. Investing in quality child care is a smart choice that we can and must make in 1998."

For more information about the Campaign for Child Care NOW!, call the Child Care Division at 202-662-3544 or visit CDF's Web site, www.childrensdefense.org.

Enriching children's lives after school

School-age children need safe, constructive activities to engage in each day after school (see the November 1997 *CDF Reports*). Research indicates that children who are left alone after school are at greater risk of truancy, risk-taking behavior, substance abuse, poor grades, and stress. In fact, juvenile crime peaks between 3 p.m. and 7 p.m.

But there is a dire shortage of programs for school-age children, and just one-third to one-half of the nation's schools have any type of after-school programming. The Campaign for Child Care NOW! would like to see Congress invest sufficient funds to serve all of the nearly 5 million school-age children left home alone each week.

"Children are on their own in empty houses and unsafe streets when they have nowhere to go in the afternoons and evenings," says CDF Assistant General Counsel Kim Wade. "We cannot continue neglecting school-age children at such a critical time for their lives and futures."

The Clinton Administration and the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation recently announced joint proposals that take a first step in addressing the problem. The Clinton Administration requested $1 billion over five years for the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program, which helps schools set up before- and after-school programs. The program enables schools to stay open longer and serve as safe, drug-free havens where children can do homework, receive tutoring and mentoring, and engage in supervised recreational activities. The Mott Foundation has pledged $55 million over five years.

The funds are a welcome increase from FY 1998 funding levels of $40 million and FY 1997 of $1 million. These efforts are a good start but will only reach 500,000 children—just one out of 10 latchkey children.

"This initiative must be supplemented so that communities support a variety of options, in addition to schools, for meeting the need for school-age care," says Wade. "It is important that resources are available to support the families, child care centers, religious organizations, community and youth organizations, and others that help provide care for school-age children."

Children need quality child care

All children deserve quality child care, but what exactly does *quality* mean? There are several key aspects to quality child care, says CDF Child Care Director Helen Blank. One, children need to be in a safe and healthy environment. Two, children need caregivers who are nurturing, knowledgeable about children's development, and can provide a stable presence in children's lives. Finally, children need to be in a setting where the caregiver can interact with small numbers of children so that each child receives personal attention.

Providing quality care is a costly, labor-intensive undertaking that requires investments in staff training and compensation, as well as materials and facilities. At the same time, though, child care programs struggle to keep child care costs affordable for families. But with child care costing between $4,000 and $10,000 a year per child, and half of America's families with young children earning less than $35,000 per year, it is clear that the numbers don't add up.

Ensuring quality care for our children also requires strong state licensing standards and enforcement. Yet significant numbers of child care settings are not regulated at all or must meet only minimal safety standards. In addition, many states fail to adequately enforce the standards that are in place. It is no surprise then that with little public investment in child care quality, America is facing serious child care challenges.

Many states do not have the resources necessary to help enhance the quality of child care in their communities. As a result, they cannot always share information with families about their child care choices, ensure a good supply of licensed child care providers, or offer child care staff training and adequate compensation.

With additional resources, such as those being discussed in Congress, every state could undertake such efforts and take a more comprehensive approach. Several states are already taking steps to address specific aspects of the quality problem.

Florida: Through its Child Care Initiative, Florida is increasing the availability of licensed and registered family child care homes, especially in targeted areas with a shortage of providers relative to the number of parents receiving welfare. The program focuses on providing training assistance such as job shadowing and mentoring, making loans available to providers who need to be licensed, and creating a consumer education campaign. The initiative aims to increase to more than 1,000 the number of *accredited* centers and family child care homes in the state over three years.

Oklahoma: Oklahoma is improving child care quality through a number of strategies, including investing $1.2 million to hire five licensing supervisors and 27 licensing monitors to inspect child care programs.

North Carolina: North Carolina's Teacher Education and Compensation Helps (TEACH) initiative invests in compensation and training for caregivers by offering scholarships to help child care teachers, center directors, and family child care providers pursue child care credentials or degrees in child development. Participants can receive wage increases or bonuses when they complete an agreed-upon number of course hours. The program is improving the skills of child care providers and is having a marked effect on staff turnover rates: fewer than 10 percent of child care providers left their jobs during the year, compared with North Carolina's 42 percent previous annual turnover rate.

Many states do not have the resources necessary to help enhance the quality of child care in their communities.

West Virginia: West Virginia has committed a portion of its Child Care and Development Block Grant quality funds to support its first statewide network of resource and referral agencies, including a statewide coordinator and a training library for child care providers.

California: California recently took a positive step in helping parents who receive Temporary Assistance to Needy Families learn more about their child care options. County welfare departments now must refer families to local child care resource and referral programs, which will work with parents to help them understand their options and locate good child care.

Common myths about child care

MYTH: There is no child care problem.

RESPONSE: Studies show that families with children are struggling to pay for care, that the quality of care is often mediocre to poor, and that many parents—particularly those with infants, school-age children, children with disabilities, and those working odd hours, or living in low-income communities—are unable to find the care they need.

MYTH: All parents are satisfied with their children's care.

RESPONSE: Ask parents in America about child care and they'll tell you they wish they could do better for their children but can't because the costs are too high, the quality they're looking for does not exist, or the demands of their work schedules limit their choices. In a recent *Parents* magazine poll, more than half the parents who responded admitted that they worry every week whether their child is receiving enough one-on-one attention, eating properly, learning, and adjusting to the care environment. More than half reported having had a very bad experience with child care.

MYTH: The quality of child care doesn't have much impact on a child's development.

RESPONSE: Both common sense and research show that children's brains are growing most quickly during the first three years of life and that their experiences during these critical early years lay the foundation for the rest of their lives. Given these findings, it isn't surprising that studies repeatedly have shown that *good* quality child care—care that provides a loving, nurturing, and stable environment—helps children enter school ready to succeed, improves their skills, and keeps them safe while their parents work. The positive impact of good care is even greater for low-income children. And studies have shown that *poor* quality care—which is too often unstimulating, uncaring, or even unsafe—deprives children of the strong start they need.

MYTH: Child care is not a problem for most families because significant numbers of children are living in homes with a stay-at-home mother.

RESPONSE: Only 23 percent of all families with children younger than age 6—and only one-third of married couples with young children—have one parent who works and one parent who stays home. More parents than ever are working outside the home, and many families rely on the mother's income to make ends meet. A national study found that 55 percent of working women provide *half or more* of their family's income. Many families with young children have no choice but to work outside the home. One of every three children with a working mother either is poor, despite their mother's earnings, or would be poor if their mother didn't work. Nearly 30 percent of all mothers in the work force with children under age 6 are single mothers. In addition, most parents want their children to have some preschool experience before they enter kindergarten—75 percent of all 5-year-olds are cared for on a regular basis in a child care center before they enter kindergarten.

MYTH: Most parents can use free care provided by relatives or friends.

RESPONSE: Although care provided by relatives can be a good option in many cases—one that about one-fourth of America's families use—it is not necessarily the family's preferred option, and it is not always available or free. One national study reported that one-third of employed mothers who used relatives to care for their preschoolers paid for that care.

Common myths about child care
(Continued from page 11)

Another study of welfare recipients in Illinois revealed that 67 percent of single parents did not have relatives or friends available to provide inexpensive or free care. It is important that we help all families make the choices they want—by helping them afford their first choice of care, whether it be a relative, neighbor, neighborhood child care home, or child care center.

MYTH: Lack of child care is not a barrier to work.

RESPONSE: Parents cannot go to work each day unless they have safe, reliable care for their children. Studies have shown that child care problems can cause parents to miss work or lose their jobs and that the lack of child care is a primary barrier preventing welfare recipients from getting and keeping jobs. Child care assistance is therefore key to efforts to move families from welfare to work and to help low-income parents stay employed.

MYTH: Parents can always find enough quality child care.

RESPONSE: Numerous studies demonstrate widespread shortages of child care, particularly for infants and for school-age children. A national study found that demand for infant care far exceeded the supply in the majority of cities examined. In Boulder, Colo., and San Francisco, staff from child care agencies reported that women had lost their jobs and returned to welfare because they couldn't find care for their infants. Severe shortages in school-age care were also found in Bath, Maine, Birmingham, Ala., Chicago, and San Francisco. Data also show that public schools in low-income communities are far less likely to offer prekindergarten programs (16 percent) than are schools in more affluent areas (nearly 33 percent) or to offer extended-day and enrichment programs that can help keep children safe after school. Furthermore, when parents locate child care, it is often of poor quality. According to the Carnegie Corporation, child care and early education services in the United States "have so long been neglected that they now constitute some of the worst services for children in Western society." The care most children receive not only can "threaten their immediate health and safety, but also can compromise their long-term development."

MYTH: Welfare reform won't increase demand for child care.

RESPONSE: There is widespread agreement that welfare reform will significantly increase the demand for child care and that the current supply of child care is insufficient to meet that demand. For example, a 1997 General Accounting Office study reported that the increased work participation requirements of the welfare law will cause the need for child care to exceed the supply, particularly for infants and school-age children. In Chicago, the supply could meet only 17 percent of the need for school-age care and only 12 percent of the need for infant care under welfare reform. A recent study in New York City estimated that an additional 61,000 children could need child care services by the end of 1999 because of welfare reform. The city had only provided funds for 27,500 of them, leaving potentially 33,500 unserved.

MYTH: Child care proposals call for big government solutions, such as government-run child care centers or for all children to be in "institutionalized" care.

RESPONSE: This myth is wrong on two fronts. First, there are no government-run centers. Child care centers are either operated on a for-profit or nonprofit basis and are often run by community agencies, religious institutions, or local youth-serving groups such as the YMCA or YWCA. Second, no child care proposal directs children to child care centers. Instead, they allow parents to select from a range of choices—neighborhood child care homes, relatives, child care centers, and neighbors—whatever option they believe is best for their children. Many of the current child care proposals also provide tax credits to families when one parent stays at home.

MYTH: Businesses can pay for child care.

RESPONSE: While a number of businesses have implemented creative approaches to help their employees find and pay for child care, much more should be done. At this point, only a fraction of businesses address child care problems, and business expenditures account for only a small percentage (1 percent) of total child care spending.

Furthermore, more than 60 percent of women work for small businesses. These businesses often find it more difficult than larger ones to provide on-site child care (or other benefits) to help parents find and afford child care.

Businesses must do more to assist their employees with balancing the demands of work and family. For example, they should help defray child care costs for those earning low and moderate wages, provide information about child care, and support efforts to improve care in their communities. Yet, businesses cannot be expected to offer all the solutions. The private sector isn't going to be able to solve this problem alone, any more than the federal government can solve it alone. It's going to take all of us, working together in our families, our businesses, our neighborhoods, our places of worship, and with our elected officials.

For additional myths and responses, or for general information about child care, contact CDF's Child Care Division at 202-662-3544, or visit CDF's Web site, www.childrensdefense.org.

Police officials urge child care investments

Citing the connection between quality child care and crime prevention, a group of more than 170 law enforcement officials is urging lawmakers to make greater investments in children's healthy development.

"Quality educational child care for preschool children and after-school activities for school-age youngsters are among the most powerful weapons in America's anti-crime arsenal," the group said in a new report from Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, a Washington, D.C.-based organization.

Photo © Rick Reinhard

Melvin Wearing, chief of police in New Haven, Conn., urges lawmakers to invest in child care at a Capitol Hill news conference.

"Our federal and state governments are falling far short of the investment in child care and after-school programs needed to meet their responsibility to protect the public safety," they said. "That shortfall is part of a gaping crime prevention deficit that jeopardizes the safety of every American."

With Congress poised to consider a child care initiative in 1998, police officials are urging lawmakers to put additional resources into the Child Care and Development Block Grant (CCDBG), Head Start, and Early Head Start. The officials also believe Congress should increase funding for the Dependent Care Tax Credit, which helps families with their child care expenses, and the 21st Century Community Learning Centers program for school-age children (see box, page 7).

The report, *Quality Child Care and After-School Programs: Key Weapons Against Crime*, points to strong evidence of the impact good quality child care can have on a child's development. Studies in Michigan and New York, for example, reported that programs for at-risk children under age 5 cut their risk of later delinquency and chronic lawbreaking by 80 percent to 90 percent. In Baltimore, an analysis of an after-school program reported that it reduced neighborhood crime by 42 percent.

According to the report, 92 percent of police chiefs nationwide agree that America could sharply reduce crime if government invested more in programs to help children and youth get a "good start" in life.

One police chief advocating strongly for greater investments in child care is Melvin Wearing, chief of police for New Haven, Conn. At an early February news conference, Wearing told lawmakers that investing in children may be expensive, but that not investing is more expensive. "When [a] child has received the services he or she needs, there may be a store that isn't robbed, an elderly woman who isn't held up at gunpoint, or a police officer who doesn't lose his life enforcing the law."

He joined child advocates and a bipartisan group of lawmakers in urging passage of the Healthy and Smoke-Free Children Act, S.1492, a bill sponsored by Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.) and Rep. Rosa DeLauro (D-Conn.). The bill would increase the tobacco tax by $1.50 over three years to provide revenue for child care programs while curbing teen smoking.

"For years, tobacco companies have targeted children and teenagers to make them life-long tobacco addicts," he said. "I fully support legislation to deter smoking, increase the tobacco tax, and use the revenue for early childhood education and after-school programs."

Copies of the report, Quality Child Care and After-School Programs: Key Weapons Against Crime, *are available from Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, 202-638-0690; www.fightcrime.org.*

A look at where we stand after 25 years of work on behalf of children

(Continued from page 2)

supplementing their incomes until they reach the federal poverty line ($16,050 for a family of four in 1997). A program in Texas is increasing the business community's support for local child care. Through the Corporate Champions Program, 10 companies have donated funds to help support child care centers, develop resource and referral services for member companies' employees, and provide equipment grants and scholarships for centers and family child care providers.

A Maryland initiative has increased health care for teens by contracting with school-based centers. In Allegheny County, Pa., a 30 percent drop in the number of youths arrested for violent crimes has been recorded, thanks to an initiative that prompted local law enforcement and child-serving agencies to work together. And in Kentucky, communities are establishing neighborhood centers where families can go to receive emergency financial assistance, health care, or help with parenting skills— all under one roof.

Communities everywhere can learn from these innovative projects and do much more for children in years to come.

Order The State of America's Children Yearbook 1998 *from CDF Publications, 25 E Street NW, Washington DC 20001; 202-662-3652; $14.95 per copy plus $2 for shipping and handling. Also available from CDF is* Children in the States 1998, *state-by-state tables detailing children's status and participation in a variety of programs; $4.95.*

Short Takes

Study finds no link between minimum wage hike, job loss

The federal minimum wage increase that took effect beginning Oct. 1, 1996, did not result in widespread job loss, according to reports from the nonpartisan Economic Policy Institute (EPI). Instead, the benefits of the two-step wage boost (from $4.25 per hour to $5.15 per hour) have gone primarily to low-income working families, 40 percent of whom received more than half the gains attributed to the increase.

The Sky Hasn't Fallen: An Evaluation of the Minimum-Wage Increase studies the first installment of the raise (to $4.75 an hour) and shows that, contrary to the claims of those opposed to the wage increase, employment opportunities for teens and young adults were not adversely affected by the wage hike. EPI updated its findings in a look at the full 90-cent increase and found that close to 10 million workers will benefit, 71 percent of whom are adults.

The findings may help bolster arguments that Congress should raise the minimum wage further to ensure that low-wage workers are earning family-supporting incomes, says CDF Family Income Director Deborah Weinstein, noting that full-time work at minimum wage only provides income equivalent to 83 percent of the 1997 poverty threshold for a family of three.

"With record-breaking numbers of poor children in working families, it is critically important to move minimum wage workers out of poverty," Weinstein says.

President Clinton called for a further increase in the minimum wage in his State of the Union address. Two weeks later, the President and House and Senate Democratic leaders agreed to back 50-cent increases in each of two years, raising the minimum wage to $6.15 in January 2000. Sen. Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.) and Rep. David Bonior (D-Mich.) are expected to introduce the new legislation in March.

EPI's initial report is based on data from the U.S. government's *Current Population Survey* covering the period from October to March. The update, *America's Well-Targeted Raise*, shows some of the effects of the second phase of the minimum wage increase, which occurred on Sept. 1, 1997, and boosted the hourly rate from $4.75 to $5.15. A fuller report will be released later in the spring.

For copies of The Sky Hasn't Fallen: An Evaluation of the Minimum-Wage Increase *and* America's Well-Targeted Raise, *call 1-800-EPI-4844 or visit EPI's Web site at www.epinet. org.*

Photo © Tara C. Parry

Web routinely infringes on children's privacy

An overwhelming majority of Web sites catering to children are gathering personal information without prominently posting confidentiality statements or obtaining parental permission, according to a recent survey conducted by the Federal Trade Commission (FTC).

During "Kids' Privacy Surf Day" last fall, FTC staff found that 86 percent of the sites visited were collecting names, e-mail addresses, mailing addresses, and telephone numbers from children. The sites did not seek parental permission to do so nor advise parents of a way to control the collection and use of the data their children were providing.

This month the FTC is beginning an in-depth study of information collection practices on Web sites, which will be forwarded to Congress. Meanwhile, as a follow-up to its preliminary survey, the FTC has already been informing organizations that they are involved in unlawful, deceptive, and/or unfair practices by asking children to provide marketing survey data while on-line for entertainment or educational purposes without posting an advisory.

Advocates with concerns about children's privacy on the Internet should visit the FTC Web site at www.ftc.gov or write to the Consumer Response Center, Room 130, 6th Street and Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Washington, DC 20580. The Center for Media Education also provides resources for advocates at http://tap.epn.org/cme/.

Break free of TV during National TV Turn-off Week

Millions of families and thousands of schools, libraries, and community organizations will participate in the fourth annual National TV Turn-off Week, April 22–28, by leaving their television sets off for seven days and turning instead to learning, sharing, playing, and other positive activities for children and adults.

For help organizing a TV "turn-off," write TV-Free America, 1611 Connecticut Ave. NW, Suite 3A, Washington, DC 20009; call 202-887-0436; fax 202-518-5560, or e-mail tvfa@essential.org. A National TV Turn-off Week organizer's kit, with a guidebook, posters, bumper stickers, pledge cards, list of substitute activities, and TV statistics, is available for $10.

Mark your calendar: April is Child Abuse Prevention Month.